



State of Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

This past month was a very difficult month for our fields of work. The month began with the passing of Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Rep. Tom Slater and now we are faced with the passing of Sen. Edward Kennedy. For individuals with disabilities, the silencing of these three giant voices will be a major burden. Their lives have inspired all of us. But in Senator Kennedy's own words, **"the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die."** Our work is to take up this challenge.

A major part of that challenge is to continue to fight the stigma facing individuals with developmental disabilities, mental illness and addiction. Two weeks ago, we celebrated the kickoff of National Recovery Month in Providence at our "Gateway to Recovery" event. Over 800 individuals joined us to hear speeches, music, and most importantly, the voices of recovery. The message is simple – we need not be defined by our disability, and recovery to a new life is possible. Over 50 agencies joined our effort through educational booths. I would like to personally thank everyone who supported this effort to ensure that the voices of individuals who have been isolated and alone in the past are now heard. Last week was also the kickoff luncheon for the NAMI Walk on October 4th – another opportunity to continue the dialogue.

Also during August, we toured the State with members of the House Fiscal staff, Senate Fiscal staff, Budget Office and the Office of Facilities and Maintenance. They were able to meet some of our consumers of services, listen to staff and "see" the real work that is done in the community. We visited employment sites, day programs, group homes, residential treatment facilities and outpatient clinics run by agencies such as The Providence Center, MAP Healthcare, the Maher Center, Gateway Healthcare, the Homestead Group and RICLAS.

As you know, these are very difficult financial times for our State and the programs and services that we support. However, we remain steadfast in our efforts to insure that people continue to receive the supports and services necessary to protect their lives and promote recovery. It may mean difficult decisions and new ways of thinking, but the effort continues. We will shortly announce a new coalition to promote meaningful employment of individuals that we serve; we are promoting the use of SBIRT – an evidenced-based brief intervention for individuals in early stages of addiction; we are expanding the "RI Consumer Compact of Care" pilot; and we have finally passed the half-way mark in our SIS review of DD plans.

I am inspired by this effort and convinced that we will "continue the dream" as the work goes on.

Craig